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L I M I N A

The Equivocation of Meaning in Stendhal's Realism

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Stendhal, the co-founder (along with Balzac) of French realism and one of the great novelists of the nineteenth century, is famous for his use of irony. This essay argues that Stendhal's irony is more than a reflection of the contemporary social values of 'wit' and 'ridicule'*: for Stendhal, irony is the machine of textual production. Stendhal even anticipates the interpretation of his own text, occasionally interrupting the flow of the narrative in order to make an authorial comment. It is through this direct engagement with the reader's expectations that he carries subversion to the limits, as witnessed in the shock ending to his most famous novel* Le Rouge et le Noir. *Thus we note a 'double voice' in Stendhal, in which the propositions are cut down by their own contradictions. This process does not aim to arrive at truth, unlike the Socratic dialogue, but enters into an endless* mise en abyme *of shifting perspectives.*

'The task of modern philosophy has been defined: to overturn Platonism/ writes Gilles Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition.*[1] Deleuze's sentiments are echoed by contemporary intellectuals such as Michel Foucault (in his paper Theatrum Philosophicum', a convivial commentary on Deleuze's work) and Jacques Derrida (in *Dissemination,* for example). But what is at stake is not so much a direct refutation of the historical Plato as a philosophical construction of ideas or, as Deleuze calls it in that same book, an 'image of thought'.[2] It is a construction of classical logic whose downfall is mapped by Derrida across various discourses. In *De la grammatologie,* for instance, he outlines its deconstruction in the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Jean-Jacques Rousseau; in *Dissemination,* in the work of Plato himself, demonstrating that even in these 'seminal' texts the movement of dissemination announces itself as philosophical dissonance. This process, we shall argue, is the starting point for a revaluation of the realist aesthetic, taking Stendhal as our particular example.

In Plato, Rousseau and de Saussure, Derrida uncovers a logical parapraxis, a textual unconscious which unravels the manifest meaning of

the work. Derrida seizes on key moments of resonance in the text which have become shorthand for this deconstructive process. Plato's use of the word *pharmakon,* for example, given its ambiguous rendering as both 'poison' and 'medicine', subverts the meaning of the text at various crucial moments. Similarly, Rousseau's denunciation of masturbation as 'that dangerous supplement'[3] in the *Confessions* conceals a larger problematic of his search for the origin in the realm of the natural. The word 'supplement' also has a double meaning: it connotes something in excess of the original or, alternatively, its substitute. These two words, *pharmakon* and *supplement,* give a foretaste of the 'duplicity', as it were, of realism's attempts to paint the world.

Our first task is to confirm the link we have proposed between Platonism and the realist aesthetic. We must therefore ask: what does Platonism do and how does it impact on realism? Plato does not attempt to define a genus or a single species, but to make a selection, to gather a pure group from amongst a 'confused species'. 'Difference is not between species, between two determinations of a genus', writes Deleuze,

> but entirely on one side, within the chosen line of descent: there are no longer contraries within a single genus, but pure and impure, good and bad, authentic and inauthentic, in a mixture which gives rise to a large species.[4]

The division between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' is the key example: the 'true' claimant must undergo the *agon* of the Platonic contest, to be affirmed if he succeeds or to die if he fails. The task of the Platonic philosopher is therefore to divide between things-in-themselves (authentic) and their simulacra (inauthentic).

The ultimate outcome from this division is well known: Plato drives the artists and the poets out of the republic. Socrates asserts that the division between original and simulacrum extends to, and in fact conditions, epistemology. True knowledge contemplates the original whereas opinion produces simulacra. Opinion is therefore ungrounded and useless for true philosophical thought. Socrates thus sets up three hierarchical levels of meaning. The first is the Form, the original, the primary model for everything else. The second is the authenticated copy, which is achieved through a contemplation of the Form. In material terms, therefore, the work of the master craftsman is authentic because it takes its point of reference directly from the Form. The third level merely imitates these copies. A master craftsman may legitimately create a chair because it is a contemplation of the Form, but the artist who writes a poem about the chair, or who paints a picture of the chair, does so without reference to the Form of the chair and is therefore inauthentic.

At a glance, the rationalisation of Plato's division is straightforward. On the one hand, we note an apparently utilitarian value attached to the authenticated copy made by the master craftsman *(techne)*. The crafted product is good by virtue of its usefulness. On the other hand, the work of art, even if it moves the spectator, is functionally 'useless'. Its uselessness reflects its ungrounded origin. The artist fails to see, perhaps even refuses to see, the Form: the art work is a simulacrum. The work of art is therefore, according to Plato, equivalent to the production of opinion: it fails to grasp fundamental philosophical truths, leading its followers into error rather than the light of the truth. There is a sense, however, in which the moral overlay Plato attributes to his epistemology amounts to a smokescreen for a larger problem.

The problem, as we see it, is that whatever the moral or utilitarian divisions that separate the work of the craftsman and the artist, the fact remains that both engage in creative acts which require an imitative method. This congruity of productive modes prompts the divisions made by Socrates and Plato, divisions which are built on a foundation of fear. The anxiety of Platonic philosophy involves the undetected intermingling of authenticated copies and simulacra. Poets and artists are not only to be disdained, they are to be feared, they cheat us with their alternative realities. Given the ambiguous validity of Socrates himself, Plato's fear is justified. His task is to separate his master, the sage who, with the aid of his daemon, engages with the Forms, from the sophists, the purveyors of counterfeit wisdom. The most interesting battles are those in which Plato organises his forces in direct, open conflict with the enemy. Socrates argues that right and wrong can only be determined in reference to truth, to the Forms. Precisely this line of argument brings about Socrates' downfall in both a literal and a philosophical sense. Socrates' vehement rejection of sophism and its rhetoric is perpetually in danger of achieving its victory by the very means it purports to destroy. His triumph over Gorgias, for example, is achieved through a brilliant mixture of guile and wit: in other words, Socrates wins the argument, not so much because his arguments align with the eternal Ideas, but because he employs his rhetorical genius in their defence. It is a method of logical self-destruction whose irony seems lost on Plato. We encounter it once again in *The Apology* in which Socrates, as in the *Gorgias*, accuses his listeners of lacking philosophical understanding, of sacrificing the truth to rhetoric. Socrates refuses help in his hour of need: his friends are his tempters, they would have him lie, not to the court but to himself.

The form of this logic is the principle of contradiction, always the last resort for Socrates' philosophical dagger-thrusts. 'Something cannot be and not be at the same time', is its basic formula. Rhetoric is not founded in truth, for example, and therefore it is not philosophical. Rhetoric is not good, it is 'cookery'; it cannot be true if it is based on a lie. Socrates structures all his arguments (with the exception, perhaps, of *The Symposium)* around this principle. Destroy it and you have undermined the Platonic edifice,

for the task of Platonic philosophy is to combat this problem of identity. It is a supremely ironic task: how, in the first place, does the reader draw the line between Plato and his mouthpiece Socrates? Or indeed, between Socrates and his mouthpiece Plato? Surely, we might ask, one cannot be and not be Plato at the same time? Platonic philosophy thus fails its own test of authenticity.

What did Socrates fear? That the simulacrum could be mistaken for the real thing. But this logic, in the end, is doomed to self-contradiction. Plato wants to distinguish the original from the simulacrum, arguing that the properties of truth and virtue are invested in the former. But the process of division can only be deductive, it must begin from perceptible properties in order to deduce whether something is true or counterfeit. Does the status of the object as original or simulacrum matter more than its properties? For Plato this is rarely a problem, since he banishes those most likely to complicate his system, the artists and the poets. The shadow of the doppelganger (ever present in the ambiguity of the Socrates/Plato dyad) haunts this logic: what if the test should fail? What if the counterfeit is mistaken for the original? What does it matter, if its properties fulfil the requirements of the test?

Postmodernism, of course, reclaims the simulacrum for its own. Believing it can overcome Platonism by the wholesale embrace of its arch-enemy, the creation of postmodern simulacra involves the provocative construction of overt illusions. Although postmodern art and literature push the limits of their various discourses, folding them back on themselves with self-reflexive irony, there is a powerful sense in which these attempts at being revolutionary are tainted by an aura of self-defeat. Postmodern art works are constructed as illusions, as simulacra. But this so-called illusion simultaneously conceals and announces itself: within the space of the illusion, the mechanism of disillusionment trumpets the constructed, unnatural presence of the work. Certainly this denaturalisation of reception is one way of opposing the Platonic theory of Forms. At the same time, however, postmodernism's triumph sometimes causes it to overlook alternatives to this tactic, as if the only way to think outside the natural were to become grotesquely and blatantly 'unnatural'.

It is far more dangerous, and far more effective, to engage in the deceptiveness displayed by the realists. Postmodernism's cynical, world-weary demeanour manifests itself in the form of an extreme wariness of all forms of the natural. Postmodern 'truth' reflects its art: apparently natural at first glance, it reveals its artificial constructs when examined closely. Realism is excluded from the postmodern aesthetic, it is its enemy because of its excess of good faith. Postmodernism links realism to the kind of nomenclature or nominalism which is the defining characteristic of classical Platonism.

As our first piece of evidence, let us examine Stendhal's use of the icon of the guillotine. Stendhal makes it exceed its historical symbolism by

assigning to it a 'second voice' that equivocates its status within the text.[5] He considers the installation of the guillotine, an instrument made infamous by the ruthless cruelty of the revolutionary extremists, alongside the slogan *'liberte, egalite, fraternite'* (the 'first voice'), as not only a legal irony, but also as a designated limit of discourse: in the act of beheading, the guillotine removes its victim beyond the limits of life, law and language. This movement is mapped by the words ostensibly spoken by Danton:

> [O]n the eve of his death, Danton remarked in his booming voice: "It's a curious thing, the verb 'to guillotine' cannot be conjugated in all its tenses. One can say: I shall be guillotined, thou wilt be guillotined, but one does not say: I have been guillotined."[6]

Stendhal's famously terse description of Julien Sorel's execution ('Everything passed off simply and decently, with no trace of affectation on his part') accentuates the apparent simultaneity between the disconnection of the law and the silence of language.[7] The association is disrupted, however, when Julien discovers a note in the church at Verrieres that foretells his death in coded form: 'Louis Jenrel' is, of course, an anagram of 'Julien Sorel'. From this perspective, *Le Rouge et le Noir* resembles the short story 'Les Cenci', in which Stendhal details the circumstances leading to the death of Beatrix Cenci. Unlike 'Les Cenci', however, in which the narrator is at pains to present an 'authorised version' of events, *Le Rouge et le Noir* possesses a kind of 'double voice': the subtle moments of prescience are veiled cleverly by the main narrative. It is the 'authorised version' that, in contrast to the short story, delays the presentation of the *habeas corpus* until the end of the novel, thus recontextualising the various clues and hints about Julien's ultimate fate. Stendhal, in a sense, cheats the guillotine and desecrates the silence of death: *Le Rouge et le Noir* is a story told from beyond the grave.

The difficulty of distinguishing Stendhal's textual subversions arises from his frequent use of polyphony. With a veiled sense of irony, for example, Stendhal proclaims in the first preface that *De l'amour* is a 'book that ... explains simply, rationally, and, as it were, mathematically, the various feelings which succeed each other to become, in their entirety, the passion called love'.[8] Stendhal critics have usually taken this at face value. *De l'amour*, according to these critics, is Stendhal's rather idiosyncratic attempt to put into practice the sensualist philosophies that influenced him in his youth. In his journals and letters, Stendhal mentions particularly the eighteenth-century thinker Claude Helvetius, a follower of the empirical philosopher, David Hume, and Stendhal's own friend and contemporary, Destutt de Tracy. Stendhal makes occasional reference to de Tracy's 'ideological' philosophy in *De l'amour*. In a famous and frequently quoted footnote, Stendhal writes:

> I have called this essay a book of ideology. ... I beg the forgiveness of the philosophers for having chosen the word *ideology* ... if ideology be a detailed description of ideas and of all the parts into which those ideas can be analysed, this book is a detailed and painstaking description of all the feelings which make up the passion called *love*. I then draw certain conclusions from this description. ... I know of no word derived from Greek that would indicate discourse upon feelings, as ideology indicates discourse upon ideas.[9]

It is questionable, however, to what extent Stendhal ever engages in a serious application of de Tracy's philosophy. Apart from the first few pages of *De l'amour*, Stendhal never comes close to a rigorous dissection of passion, and the book fragments into a heterogeneous collection of observations and anecdotes.

The fragmentation of *De l'amour* is often perceived as Stendhal's failure to follow through these philosophical principles. Synchronous with such a perception is a widespread misunderstanding of the 'double voice' of Stendhal's writings. *De l'amour* is seen as a failure insofar as its fragmentation affirms Stendhal's inability to provide a coherent - that is to say, homogeneous - interpretation of love. Critics point repeatedly to Stendhal's flirtations with Helvetius and de Tracy, and in so doing they drown out the textual clue provided by the 'second voice': his early passion for mathematics. In the *Vie de Henry Brulard*, Stendhal relates how, like Descartes, he envisioned that the apodictic certainty of mathematics could serve as the foundation for a method of discovering truth and certainty:

> Mathematics take into account only one small corner of objects (their quality [note: trans, error, should read "quantity"]), but are pleasing thereby for saying about it only things which are certain, only the truth, and almost the whole truth. At the age of fourteen, in 1797, I imagined that higher mathematics, which I have never known, contained *every* or almost every aspect of objects so that by going on I would come to know certain, indubitable things, which I could prove to myself whenever I wanted, *about everything.*[10]

Stendhal recounts that doubts began to arise because of the highhanded manner in which mathematics was taught, that his teachers indoctrinated their pupils like priests expounding on the Scriptures. He recalls a fellow student named Paul-Emile Teisseire who, although he failed to understand

the principles of mathematics, succeeded because of his ability to memorise examples and outcomes.

> [T]hey were all more or less like Paul-Emile Teisseire and learnt by rote. I often watched them up at the blackboard after a demonstration saying:
> "It's evident therefore that, etc."
> "Nothing could be less evident for you," I thought.[11]

Mathematical principles therefore remained 'mysteries', correct not because of the force of their logic but because 'by continually applying this rule in calculation, you end up with results that *are true and indisputable'*, a kind of 'inerrancy' of mathematical logic.[12] From this perspective, the seriousness of Stendhal's prefatory remarks about approaching the subject of love 'mathematically' are in doubt. Stendhal explores, in *De I'amour* and throughout his writings, what we designate as the 'double voice' of discourse, an echo or simulacrum of the text's manifest meaning.

One of the characteristics of the two great Stendhalian discourses of love and interpretation is their shared critique, through a polyphonic redoubling, of their traditional legislative function. In the case of interpretation, for example, criticism usually directs itself towards the determination and signification of textual symbols, the meaning of scenes, intratextual and intertextual references: in other words, its purpose lies in deciding whether a particular reading of a text is either valid or invalid. Similarly in 'The Salzburg Bough', a short story that appears in the appendix to *De I'amour*, an unnamed character remarks 'that one either loves or does not love'.[13] Love, in Stendhal, cannot be separated from the process of interpretation: *De l'amour* constitutes the question of whether one is in love or not as exclusively a matter of interpretation. The legislative authority of these discourses is undermined, however, by the 'double voice'. Stendhal writes in *De l'amour*, for example, that 'in love *possession is nothing, only enjoyment [puissance] matters*'.[14] Later in the book, the secondary voice makes its reply: Stendhal examines the character modelled on Don Juan, the lover who places the pursuit of pleasure above all else but whose actual pleasure and proximity to love, according to the 'fundamental contradiction' of his role, fades in proportion to his ability to seduce.[15] To reformulate the discarded maxim: 'One either has pleasure, or one does not.'

The structure of this logic is classical: it reanimates the principle of contradiction that lies at the heart of Platonic philosophy. The Socrates-Plato nexus is one of the great symbols of monological, legislative discourse, and it is hardly surprising that Julien Sorel's trial, for instance, is allusively compared to its Socratic precursor. Julien's trial functions as an echo, a second voice that commentates on both itself and its precursor. Julien and Socrates each begin their apologies by pointing out that the charges laid against them are superficial, that they are being charged because of an

ulterior, political motive. Apart from this thematic resonance, Stendhal adds various other, more tangible similarities to his text. The second mark of parallelism, for instance, is a predilection for improvisation.

> "Wasn't I fine yesterday when I stood up to speak?" was Julien's reply. "I was improvising for the first time in my life. "[16]

> [W]hat you will hear will be improvised thoughts in the first words that occur to me, confident as I am in the justice of my cause.[17]

Another point of resemblance is the jury's verdict. Socrates is sentenced to commit suicide by drinking a cupful of hemlock. M. de Frilair, because of Julien's defiance, describes his sentence as a 'sort of *suicide'*.[18] Socrates' friend Crito tries to persuade him to attempt an escape made possible by bribery.[19] Julien's friend Fouque visits him in jail with the same idea.[20] The obvious dissimilarity would seem to be their age, since Socrates is an old man of 70 and Julien a precocious 23-year old. It is by means of this contrast, however, that Stendhal manages to play ironically with the original material. One of the charges brought against Socrates was that he was corrupting the youth of his day. The character of Julien embodies the conflict between the decadence of his contemporary culture and the nobility he secretly cherishes in such figures as Napoleon. Stendhal thus inverts the original situation. Socrates is charged with using his teaching to corrupt the youth (first voice), whereas Julien is the corrupt youth condemned for his Socratic attack on the jury (second voice).

Stendhal's demolition of the dictum 'that one either love or does not love' is aimed squarely against the principle of contradiction which underlies Platonic philosophy. His rejection of the contradictory technique of reasoning, as usual, is not explicit, operating instead at the level of textual symbolism. The sheer magnitude of Plato's influence has transformed his metaphors into a conventional symbolic code. He outlines the code in Book 4 of *The Republic*, in which Socrates sketches a trio of symbols designed to map various human faculties onto zones of the body. He describes these metaphors in detail in the *Timaeus:*

> The part of the soul which is the seat of courage, passion and ambition they located nearer the head [the seat of reason] between midriff and neck; there it would be well-placed to listen to the commands of reason and combine with it in forcibly restraining the appetites when they refused to obey the word of command from the citadel. ... The appetite for food and drink and other natural needs of the body they

> located between the midriff and the region of the navel, building in the area a kind of manger for the body's food; and they secured appetite there like a wild beast, which must be fed with the rest of us if mortals were to exist at all.[21]

Given this legend, the Stendhalian critique begins to emerge. It is the powerful metaphor of the guillotine, a recurring motif in Stendhal's writings, which once again provides the counter image, the second voice or simulacrum.

If the head symbolises reason, the domain of the philosopher-king, then the guillotine is the metaphor for revolutionary madness, not in the sense that madness has usurped the place of reason, but that reason itself bears the hallmarks of an endemic form of insanity. The guillotine appears as a parody of a medical procedure, akin to the Platonic *pharmakon*, whose function is to amputate the diseased part. It is without surprise that we recall Julien's first substitute father, a veteran of the Napoleonic campaigns and a former army surgeon. Reason is no longer separate from the ravenous 'wild beast' of appetite: it is just as capable of creating its own self-professed 'monster' in Julien Sorel. The surgeon, at his death, leaves to Julien 'thirty or forty books': food, in other words, for the mind, not the belly.[22] The displacement is accentuated in the following chapter by Julien's refusal to take his meals with the servants:

> This horror of eating with the servants was not a natural instinct with Julien. He would have done far harder things to make his way in the world. He drew his repugnance from Rousseau's *Confessions*, the only book that had helped his imagination to form a picture of society. This work, together with a collection of bulletins of the Grand Army and the *Memoriale de Saint-Helene*, comprised his manual of conduct.[23]

Julien's bookish delicacy reflects a kind of madness: even though he is a thoroughly ambitious young man, his values and his 'energy', as Stendhal puts it, are comically out of place.

In his chapter 'The Novel and the Guillotine', Peter Brooks claims that the double voice of *Le Rouge et le Noir* is essentially an Oedipal discourse, in which the celebrated intrigue surrounding Julien's paternity is directly linked to the discourse of the text's own self-legitimisation:

> It is through misinterpretation and the postulation of concealment - of what is "really", as far as we know, the absence of anything to be concealed - that Julien's noble illegitimacy begins to achieve textual status, to acquire an authorship based on a gratuitous play of substitutes for the origin.[24]

Brooks thus sets up an interplay between the hero-son and the narrator-father in which, true to the Oedipal prototype, the text rebels against itself in the novel's shock ending. Julien is a parricide, a 'monster' who 'figures the out-of-place, the unclassifiable, the transgressive, the seductive'.[25] But Julien's 'monstrosity' is not exposed until the end of the novel and, in a last defiant act, he in turn exposes another monstrosity: the tyranny of the writing process. Brooks notes that, in the final chapters of *Le Rouge et le Noir*, intrusions by the narrative voice are diminished by contrast with the body of the novel, as if Julien's fatal action has resulted in 'a denuding of the very act of narrative invention'.[26] Brooks concludes that it is precisely the condition of being a character, of being narratable, that places Julien in an irredeemable and inevitable position of Oedipal guilt.

> The monster is the figure of displacement, transgression, desire, deviance, instability, the figure of Julien's project for himself, of his projective plot. ... [Julien moves] beyond paternal authority and the plotted novel. ... The extranovelistic perspective of its closing chapters serves to underline the disjuncture between plot and life, between Julien's novel and Stendhal's, between authoritative meaning and the subversion of meaning. ... To read a novel - and to write one - means to be caught up in the seductive coils of a deviance: to seduce, of course, is to lead from the straight path, to create deviance arid transgression. ... The novel rejects not only specific fathers and authorities but the very model of authority, refusing to subscribe to paternity as an authorising figure of novelistic relationships. Ultimately, this refusal may indicate why Stendhal has to collapse his novels as they near their endings: the figure of the narrator as father threatens domination, threatens to offer an authorised version. He too must be guillotined.[27]

The source of 'monstrosity' is explicit: it springs from the head, unrelenting in the force of its terrible logic. Julien claims, after all, that his behaviour proceeded, not from some irrational urge but from 'the compelling thought of *duty* ... I was not carried away'.[28]

The focus of our analysis so far falls on the head: the belly does not seem to share its position as a prominent motif in Stendhal's writings. In a

memorable piece of textual criticism, however, Carol Mossman reveals that, at an unconscious level, the belly emerges as another subversive discourse. Since the advent of psychoanalysis there has been no shortage of commentary about Stendhal's own Oedipus complex. His vehement hatred of his father and his intense love for his mother are described vividly in the *Vie de Henry Brulard*. And yet - Brooks is a classic example of this phenomenon - it is the father who claims the center of attention. Mossman unveils the belly as a second voice: not, this time, as a symbol of appetite, but as a narrative of birth. 'Making visible is the first step', she writes, 'toward exposing a narratological mastery of production based precisely on the absent maternal function'.[29] Mossman contrasts the conventional Oedipal reading of Stendhal's relationship with his mother - namely, that Henriette Beyle, as the object of the young Henri's love, is the catalyst and trigger for Stendhal's hatred of his father - with a perspective revealed by a close consideration of Chapter 32 of the *Vie*. Her approach to Stendhal's memoir is refreshing: using the same analytical tools as those deployed in literary analysis, she considers the text as a work of narrative rather than as a programmatic piece of psychological deployment.

Chapter 32 of Vie *de Henry Brulard* unfolds as a triptych of scenes, placed side by side without any apparent link. In the first, Stendhal tells of his first hunting experience. His excursion meets with early success when he kills two thrushes. He then misses a fox, and finally kills another bird. The second scene describes a strange conspiracy conducted by Stendhal and some friends, who carry out an attack on the Tree of Fraternity, one of a trio of symbols set up by the revolutionary upheaval. One of them takes a shot at the tree; chased by the city guards, they take refuge with a pair of old women who lie in order to protect the boys. The third and final scene tells of Stendhal's presence at the execution, by guillotine, of a parricide named Jomard. The connection between these three scenes, argues Mossman, is the uncanny sensation provoked each time by a missed encounter. Stendhal dwells at length on his inability to hit the fox, for example, and frames it between his two successful shots. 'Two acts whose violence haunts him to this very day surround a miss who inexplicability HB [Henry Brulard] strongly insists upon.'[30] The attack on the Tree of Fraternity is especially extraordinary: Stendhal's contempt for the *ancien regime* is a celebrated indicator of his intense hatred for his conservative, despotic father. At the time of writing in 1836, this attack on his own political values appears to Stendhal as both absurd and inexplicable. Furthermore, although he was the instigator of the episode, Stendhal wonders that he cannot remember who it was that pulled the trigger. A shot is fired, nevertheless, and the boys take flight. The motif of the shot disappears in the third scene, and is replaced by the falling of the guillotine blade:

> One Jomard, the parricide, was guillotined on August 23, 1797. With horror Henry observed the "drops of blood forming all along the blade before falling". However, the reader is not privy to the fatal severance. The narrator spares us that final violence in a sort of textual black-out reminiscent, for that matter, of Julien Sorel's decapitation, also an ellipsis. It is as if the text, in its refusal to recount, were miming that definitive loss of consciousness which is, par excellence, a beheading. In fact, to return to this syncope which closes chapter 32, one realises that it is neither the blade which falls nor the head: "I was so near that after the execution I saw the drops of blood forming all along the blade before falling." Whether it was the drops of blood or the horrified young spectator that fell remains open to question.[31]

All three scenes therefore share this 'attack' or 'hunt' motif that is elided by the textual erasure of the lethal moment.

The third scene provides Mossman with the decisive theme of parricide: Stendhal, she argues, uses the descriptions of the hunt and the conspiracy in order to frame his unconscious reaction to the crime that constitutes his own barely veiled fantasy of murder. The three scenes together constitute a fragmented and yet thematically coherent defensive strategy. In the first place, the young Henri Beyle shoots and kills some thrushes. His guilt at this violence is minimised: he has merely killed small, harmless creatures, and 'did he not miss the object of a real hunt, the fox? True, HB did pull the trigger, but he missed'.[32]

> But wait - he did not pull the trigger after all! This is what the conspiracy episode is at pains to demonstrate, even though a crime might have taken place. The gun, it turns out, is an associative device whose function is to link the hunt to the conspiracy, but it is perhaps the conspiracy episode which will reveal what has in fact transpired. At some level, an equation is being made between pulling the trigger and missing, and hitting the target without pulling the trigger. Combining the two, one is confronted with a simultaneous admission and denial, a yes-and-no, that is, a (de)negation.[33]

The appearance of the parricide Jomard at the end of the chapter accentuates Stendhal's painstaking separation of himself from the crime: the guillotine's scaffold marks a physical limit between his unrealised fantasies and Jomard's concrete actions.

The movement of chapter 32, in which Stendhal conceals his murderous impulses behind a triptych of defensive narratives, still begs one crucial question: against whom is this aggression directed? The text points emphatically at Cherubin Beyle, 'the sly fox who "cheated" his only son out of rightful inheritance', and the Jesuitical tutor M. Raillane, an alternative 'father' in young Henri's life.[34] It is Raillane, after all, who callously claims: 'My friend, this comes from God' at the death of Henriette Beyle.[35] It is at this point that Mossman chooses to make her revelation. Stendhal's hatred for the paternal - for Cherubin Beyle, for M. Raillane, for God - is a secondary reaction to an event that precedes it: an unspoken, repressed death-wish on the mother. Her conclusion is drawn from a complicated, triangular structure of desire and guilt. Mossman points to a letter from Stendhal to Sainte-Beuve, for example, in which he writes that he believes in God, so that when he dies he can chastise Him for His cruelty. God, the symbol of paternity, is the second gunman: it is He, as it were, who fires the mysterious shot that strikes down Henriette Beyle (whom Stendhal describes, as if linking her with the hunting scene, as being 'quick and agile as a hind').[36] In Mossman's structure, Stendhal attributes the carrying out of the murderous act to the paternal trinity (God, Cherubin, Raillane), which provides the cause of his manifest hatred, at the same time bearing an unconscious burden of guilt for his own matricidal fantasy.

> With respect to Chapter 32, then, it might be supposed that the wishing of death upon the father functions as a sort of screen which points to and away from the other scene - that of the matricide.... It is not the fox, after all, but the doe which was the hunter's real target. And the strategy has been brilliant, it must be conceded: the hunter-narrator had flaunted his paternal hostility as a sort of decoy to divert the reader's interest away from the real object of interest, Henriette Beyle. Only the overloud protestations of ignorance (read as denial) give him away.[37]

There is ample evidence to back Mossman's claim. There is, for instance, a notably sharp division between the two mother figures of Henriette and Seraphie. Henriette is portrayed as an ideal woman, who managed to govern her household benevolently while 'reading Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the original'; Seraphie, by contrast, is remembered as being nothing short of demonic.[38] It is precisely this overstatement of sentiment that Mossman finds suspicious. The reader is given a truer glimpse into the Stendhalian psyche, perhaps, in the notable confrontation with Seraphie in which Stendhal realises, to his astonishment, that in spite of his hatred against this maternal usurper he nevertheless lusted after her. Mossman also returns to the parricide Jomard. Jomard killed his father-in-law, but Stendhal's *Vie*

remains silent about his equally criminal acts against women. In addition, Jomard killed his mother-in-law, with whom he had conducted an affair, prompting Mossman to pose the pointed question: 'Which, if either, of these two parricides takes precedence? Here once again the silence of the text speaks its truth.'[39] In the same episode, a parricide named Mingrat is mentioned; once again, Stendhal spells out the act of patricide while remaining silent on Mingrat's horrific violation and murder of a woman.

Stendhal's unconscious death-wish against his mother, Mossman concludes, is not an arbitrary hatred since it is triggered, on each occasion, by the pregnancy of Henriette Beyle. She locates two more instances of this anti-maternal aggression in a pair of infantile attacks on women carried out by the young Henri. She speculates that these attacks, recounted at the beginning of Chapter 3, not only occurred when Henriette was pregnant with siblings - rivals, in other words, for Henri's love - but that 'they are both screen memories at once summarising and masking the circumstances surrounding Henriette Beyle's death' - a death that was brought about, of course, by childbirth.[40] If Mossman is correct, then the overturning of the Platonic structure and the articulation of the double voice or simulacrum is complete. The belly swells, in the meantime, pregnant with the promise of a new future.

The mark of the Stendhalian text is its double voice, a generation of simulacra and an equivocation of meaning which is not, however, a twofold, dialectical construction. Heterogeneity in Stendhal's texts does not operate by proliferating ideologically motivated characters. His characters adopt ambiguous stances even towards their apparent hermeneutic. Stendhal is therefore able to construct great moments of irony from this ambivalence, such as the image of Lucien Leuwen, who secretly sympathises with the republicans and the writings of Saint-Simon, dressed in the uniform of the *juste-milieu*, kneeling on the dirty floor of a church in order to win approval from Nancy's social elite, the royalist faction. Amidst this tumult of discourses, the excess of polyphony drowns any single voice. The repeated claims by Stendhal that realism 'reflects' the world, that it repeats the Platonic contemplation of transcendent forms, are parodies, satirical gestures whose movements are not meant to be taken with gravity. We have considered the example of Stendhal, one of the founders of French realism, but our arguments apply across the tradition of European realism, to authors as diverse as Balzac, Poe and Dostoevsky. Realism is a refutation of Platonism, a language of the simulacrum: it is the beginning (to borrow Deleuze's slogan) of modern philosophy.

Are the realists for or against Platonism? Are they on the side of the Form or of the simulacrum? Plato himself does not hesitate to answer this question; he banishes the artists and poets from the republic. Although there are obviously enormous differences between Greek art and the realist literature of the nineteenth century, both lay a common claim to the art of copying, of mimesis. The reason for banishment was twofold. In the first

place, the simulacrum of art was, as we have explained, not grounded in the Forms. It was therefore inherently a poor production and unworthy of existence. The second reason is more powerful. Socrates decreed that the artists and poets ought to be banished because they produce bad copies. One would think that the inferiority of the copy would be enough for citizens of the republic to recognise the worthlessness of these artefacts. Herein lies the problem: although artistic mimetic work is inferior in Plato's schema, it is in another sense *too* good because of its ability to lead astray. Socrates himself is tempted since he is moved, against his better judgement, by Homer and the other canonical poets. For Plato, therefore, the foremost problem remains one of distinguishing the original from the copy, the integral from the counterfeit. We attribute this tactic of the counterfeit to the realist aesthetic. Why should we take at face value classical realist maxims such as 'all is true' (Balzac) and 'the novel is a mirror' (Stendhal)? If we look closer we shall see that, for all their sparkle, they are fool's gold.

Notes

[1]G. Deleuze, *Difference And Repetition*, London, Athlone, 1994, p.59.
[2] See Image of Through' in ibid., pp.129-167.
[3]See J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976, pp.141-164.
[4]Ibid.,p.60.
[5]The reader will perhaps note that, although I use 'polyphony' and other terms associated with the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, I have not referred explicitly to his work in this essay. Such an omission is deliberate. The bone of contention between Bakhtin and myself lies in his notion of 'ideology'. I refer the reader to Bakhtin's claim, for example, that Shakespeare is not a polyphonic author because 'Shakespearian characters are not ideologists in the full sense of the word' *{Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p.34). This statement is alluded to in the concluding paragraph of my essay. However, to address this problem with Bakhtin directly would lead me far away from the topic in question, and so would be better explored in a different paper.
[6]Stendhal, *Scarlet And Black*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1953, p.487.
[7]Ibid.,p.508.
[8]Stendhal, *Love*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975, p.28.
[9]Ibid., p.49,nl, original italics.
[10]Stendhal, *The Life Of Henry Brulard*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1995, pp.357-358, original italics.
[11]Ibid.,p.357.
[12]Ibid.,p.358.
[13]Stendhal, *Love*, p.289.
[14]Ibid., p.112, original emphasis.
[15]Ibid.,p.208.
[16]Stendhal, *Scarlet And Black*, p.488.
[17] Plato, *The Last Days Of Socrates*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1993, p.37.
[18] Stendhal, *Scarlet And Black*, p.497, original emphasis.
[19] Plato, *The Last Days Of Socrates*, pp.78-79.
[20]Stendhal, *Scarlet And Black*, pp.462-463.
[21] Plato, *Timaeus/Critias*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977, pp.97-98.
[22] Stendhal, *Scarlet And Black*, p.38.
[23]Ibid.,p.40.
[24] P. Brooks, *Reading For The Plot: Design And Intention In Narrative*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1984, p.74.

[25]Ibid.,p.81.
[26]Ibid.,p.84.
[27]Ibid.,pp.85-87.
[28]Stendhal, *Scarlet And Black*, p.502, original emphasis.
[29]C Mossman, *Politics And Narratives Of Birth: Gynocolonization From Rousseau To Zola*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p.17.
[30]Ibid.,p.24.
[31]Ibid.,pp.25-26.
[32]Ibid.,p.27.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., p.30. The 'stolen' inheritance refers to 'a certain law of the 13th of Germinal', which Mossman refers to on p.29.
[35] Stendhal, *The Life Of Henry Brulard*, p.35.
[36] Ibid., p.29.
[37] Mossman, pp.32-33.
[38]Stendhal, *The Life Of Henry Brulard*, p.29. [39]
Mossman, p.32.